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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CU](#) [EUN](#) [PREL](#) [PO](#)
SUBJECT: PORTUGAL: NO CHANGE IN CUBA POLICY

REF: STATE 18317

Classified By: A/Pol/Econ Counselor Cari Enav. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

1. (SBU) The selection of Raul Castro as Cuba's president will not alter Portugal's support for the EU's dual-track approach of pressing for political reform while actively engaging members of civil society. The MFA Americas Director does not foresee any radical change but does see possible economic reform, given Raul's calls for greater efficiency and his outreach to Brazilian President Lula whom they see as a positive, moderate influence. Foreign Minister Amado has not scheduled a trip to Cuba despite the March 2007 invitation by Foreign Minister Perez Roque to visit the island.

No Political Change Foreseen

2. (C) MFA Americas Director Helena Coutinho told A/DCM on February 25 that the selection of Raul Castro as Cuba's new president will not alter Portugal's support for the EU's dual track approach of pressing for political reform while actively engaging civil society. Raul's government is unlikely to take the concrete political actions necessary to strengthen the relationship with the EU, she said, underscoring that the release of political prisoners would remain a top EU policy focus. Coutinho noted that Portugal's efforts during its recent EU presidency had only resulted in the release of one prisoner, and she underscored the need for a continued concerted effort in this regard at all levels.

3. (C) Portugal will keep the lines of communication open with democratic activists, members of civil society and Cuban officials as they believe it to be one of the best ways of promoting change. "Who knows," Coutinho said, "one day one of our interlocutors may be in a position to bring about real change?" She added that Foreign Minister Amado's 2008 travel schedule had not been finalized and that he currently had no plans to reciprocate the March 2007 visit of FM Perez Roque.

Economic Reform Possible

4. (C) Raul Castro is likely to implement measures to improve Cuba's standard of living, Coutinho posited, even if the government did not want to undertake larger economic reform. There are strong indications that Raul is willing to take "baby steps in the right direction" as he has publicly called for greater economic efficiency and recently sought the help of Brazilian President Lula da Silva. Coutinho commented that Lula could play a positive role, noting his moderate stance would likely facilitate his ability to serve as an intermediary between the U.S. and Cuba. She added that Hugo Chavez had lost some of his aura/appeal in Cuba since losing

the December referendum in Venezuela.

Comment

15. (C) Though pressed, Helena Coutinho did not elaborate on a Portuguese specific vision for Cuba outside of the EU context. Her thoughts on Cuba echoed MFA Political Director Bramao Ramos's comments to EUR PDAS Volker the week before at Bilateral Commission consultations in Lisbon, with two notable exceptions (septel). Coutinho was much more circumspect about the prospects for change and much more dismissive of Chavez's role in reform. Bramao Ramos, who has served as Portugal's Ambassador to Caracas, believes Chavez can play a useful role in Cuba. His views on Chavez do not reflect the views of FM Amado, who earlier had instructed Bramao Ramos to refrain advocating them. Stephenson